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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was sent to 16 rural and 16 urban elementary school principals in New Mexico to determine if professional tasks of elementary principals differed according to urban (towns of 50,000 or more) or rural (up to 2,500 population) location. Randomly selected, the principals were asked to respond to 22 questions related to tasks involving teachers and other personnel, tasks dealing with clerical work, professional duties, and other tasks. Questionnaire results from 13 urban and 11 rural principals indicated many common tasks regardless of population. Differences were that more urban than rural principals kept attendance records, more urban principals ordered supplies from the school's central office, while rural principals prepared their school's master calendar more often than urban counterparts. While most rural principals did not oversee the food service program, almost half of the urban principals had that responsibility. Implications for training of future administrators, both rural and urban, included emphasis on preparation of in-service faculty programs and personnel management, including interviewing procedures, hiring, formulation of job descriptions, personnel evaluation, and functions of special education personnel. (RS)

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Differences in Professional Tasks of Elementary Principals in Rural and Urban Areas

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May 1, 1978

by

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Teacher

Mesilla Park Elementary School
Las Cruces, New Mexico

RC010448

The central problem of this study is to determine if there are significant number of administrative tasks of elementary principals that are different depending on whether the principal is located in a rural or urban area of the state of New Mexico.

The purpose of this study is to reveal through a questionnaire if there are differences in the professional tasks of elementary principals in rural and urban areas. The questionnaire was sent to 16 randomly chosen rural principals in the state and 16 randomly chosen urban principals in the state.

In this age of changing roles for elementary principals, where central office personnel and other auxillary personnel are taking over many administrative responsibilities, there is a need to find out if the principals in a state like New Mexico have diversified responsibilities depending on the population of the different communities.

In this study there are three possible outcomes. The first is that there are no differences in the tasks preformed by principals. The second is that there are differences in the tasks preformed depending on whether the principal is located at a rural or urban school. The third possible outcome is that there are differences but that they are due to individual schools rather than population size. The data collected from the survey should be applicable in the improvement of educational practice, especially in the area of training elementary administrators.

Procedure: This study surveyed 16 rural and 16 urban principals in the state of New Mexico. The first step in the study was to review current literature to see if a similar study had previously been conducted. From the research done, it was determined that similar research had not been carried on. The next step was to determine what questions would be used on the questionnaire. Twenty two common tasks of elementary principals were decided upon from a long list of possible tasks found in various books and dissertations done on administrators. After the questionnaire was completed, the next decision was how to define which principals would be rural and which ones would be urban. The rural principals would be ones which were employed by schools in towns of 2,500 or less population. The urban principals would be ones which were employed by school systems in cities of 50,000 population or more. There were only four cities in New Mexico which qualified as urban. They were Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Cruces and Roswell. Although there were only four cities difined as urban there was a comparable number of principal positions in the four cities deifined as urban and the number of positions in all the rural communities. Using a random sampling from the New Mexico State School Directory 16 urban and 16 rural principals were chosen to send the questionnaires to. As an added incentive to the principals to return the questionnaire, a quote from Earl Nunn, Executive Director of New Mexico School Administrators, endorsing the study was received and added to the questionnaire and the cover letter sent to the principals.

Summary of the study: There were 13 returned questionnaires from the Urban principals and 11 returned questionnaires from the rural principals. The findings showed that most elementary principals have many common tasks regardless of location determined by population. There were four questions that showed differences in the tasks preformed by the rural and urban principals. The first of the four questions indicated that more urban principals kept attendance records than rural principals did. (See question 1., Table 2) The next difference was found in a question relating to ordering supplies from the central office. More urban principals ordered supplies from the schools central office. Both urban and rural principals ordered from supply houses or publishers. (See question 2 and 3, Table 2) Another difference was found in the question about preparing the school's master calendar. Rural principals had to make the master calendar for the year much more often than did the urban principals. (See question 4, Table 2) The last question where there was a significant difference between the rural and urban principals tasks had to do with overseeing the food service program. Several of the urban principals said that they had control of the food service program while only one rural principal said that he had that responsibilitie. A number of both urban principals indicated that they sometimes had to oversee the food program. (See question 1, Table 4)

The tasks on the questionnaire have been divided into four categories for analysis. The four categories are (1) Tasks involving teachers and other personnel, (2) Tasks dealing with clerical work, (3) Professional duties, (4) Other tasks.

The results from Table 1, Tasks involving teachers and other personnel showed few differences in the tasks elementary principals in Urban and Rural areas preform. The tasks that most of the principals said they carried out do indicate a need in the training program of future administrators to include information and training in many areas. Such training efforts would include emphasis in the preparation of inservice programs for faculty, procedures in interviewing, selecting and assigning personnel, writing job descriptions, evaluation of theachers and other personnel, up to date ideas on discipline, and a look at work and duties preformed by special personnel such as speech therapists.

The second table indicates the clerical work that needs to be done by an elementary principal. The clerical tasks are probably ones that do not need a great deal of emphasis in the training program.

The third table indicates the professional duties.(This is an arbitrary title for the category as all tasks preformed by administrators are his professional duties.) These tasks include defining and clarifying goals and objectives of the school, giving of time and service to the community, administering discipline, management of the school plant , and scheduling school activities and daily operation.

The third table tasks indicate a need to supply the administrator with information [illegible] organizing schedule, management of school facilities, and information on resources, both human and material, that are available in the state.

The fourth table shows other tasks that some principals might preform. Both are probably not of significant importance in a training program.

(5)

TASKS INVOLVING TEACHERS AND OTHER PERSONNEL	URBAN			RURAL		
RESPONSES	YES	NO	SOMETIMES	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1. Developing inservice programs for faculty	11	0	2	8	0	3
2. Interviewing, selecting and assignment of personnel	10	0	3	8	1	2
3. Defining and clarifying responsibility for all employees	9	1	3	9	0	2
4. Evaluating teachers and staff	13	0	0	11	0	0
5. Planning , organizing and participating in staff meetings	13	0	0	11	0	0
6. Encouraging teachers to communicate with the home	13	0	0	10	0	1
7. Cooperating with speech therapists, guidance counselors and diagnosticians	13	0	0	10	0	1
8. Supervising custodians	12	0	1	9	0	3
9. Meeting with teachers and parents about discipline problems	12	0	1	11	0	0

Table 1

TASKS DEALING WITH CLERICAL WORK RESPONSES	URBAN			RURAL		
	YES	NO	SOMETIMES	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1. Keeping attendance records	9	2	2	4	6	1
2. Ordering texts and supplies from central office	12	1	0	8	4	1
3. Ordering texts and supplies from publisher or supply house	12	1	0	9	1	1
4. Preparing school's master calendar	5	6	2	8	1	1
5. Inventorying books, equipment, and supplies	13	0	0	9	1	1
6. Completing reports, records, and written communications desired or required to facilities the work of the school or the school district	13	0	0	11	0	0

Table 2

PROFESSIONAL TASKS	URBAN			RURAL		
RESPONSES	YES	NO	SOMETIMES	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1. Defining and clarifying the goals of the school	12	0	1	11	0	0
2. Giving of time and energy to service of community	8	0	5	7	0	4
3. Administering discipline	13	0	0	11	0	0
4. Managing the school plant, facilities and equipment	12	1	0	10	0	1
5. Developing and implementing schedules involving students, staff, facilities and equipment, staff, facilities and equipment	13	0	0	9	1	1
6. Utilizing human and material resources of the community to enrich the educational program	11	0	2	8	0	3

TABLE 3

OTHER TASKS	URBAN			RURAL		
RESPONSES	YES	NO	SOMETIMES	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1. Overseeing the food service program	6	5	2	1	7	3
2. Patroling building and school grounds	9	0	4	6	2	3

TABLE 4

P.O. Box 1024
Mesilla Park, New Mexico 88047
March 7, 1973

Dear

I am presently enrolled in a graduate independent study course in the Educational Administration Department of New Mexico State University.

I am doing a survey of elementary principals in rural and urban areas of the state. I would truly appreciate you taking a few minutes of your time to fill in the short questionnaire enclosed.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Wanda Fishburn

Name of school where you are employed_____

Are the following tasks part of your position as an elementary principal:

1. Developing inservice programs for faculty	Yes	No	Sometimes
2. Defining and clarifying the goals and objectives of the school	Yes	No	Sometimes
3. Giving of time and energy to service of community	Yes	No	Sometimes
4. Interviewing, selecting and assigning personnel	Yes	No	Sometimes
5. Keeping attendance records	Yes	No	Sometimes
6. Defining and clarifying responsibility for all employees	Yes	No	Sometimes
7. Administering discipline	Yes	No	Sometimes
8. Evaluating teachers and staff	Yes	No	Sometimes
9. Ordering texts, supplies and instructional materials			
a. From central office	Yes	No	Sometimes
b. From publisher or clearing house	Yes	No	Sometimes
10. Preparing schools master calendar	Yes	No	Sometimes
11. Inventorying books, equipment, and supplies	Yes	No	Sometimes
12. Managing the school plant, facilities and equipment	Yes	No	Sometimes
13. Overseeing the food service program	Yes	No	Sometimes
14. Completing reports, records and written communications desired or required to facilitate the work of the school or the school district	Yes	No	Sometimes
15. Patroling building and school grounds	Yes	No	Sometimes
16. Planning, organizing and participating in staff meetings	Yes	No	Sometimes
17. Developing and implementing schedules involving students, staff, facilities and equipment	Yes	No	Sometimes
18. Utilizing human and material resources of the community to enrich the educational program	Yes	No	Sometimes
19. Encouraging teachers to communicate with the home	Yes	No	Sometimes
20. Cooperating with speech therapists, guidance counselors and diagnostitions	Yes	No	Sometimes
21. Supervising custodians	Yes	No	Sometimes
22. Meeting with teachers and parents about discipline problems	Yes	No	Sometimes

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February 23, 1978

A contact with Mr. Earl Nunn, Executive Director of NMSA has elicited the following comment:

> "I certainly wish to encourage those elementary principals who will be contacted to complete the questionnaire that you have received since I do believe it will contribute to our further knowledge of the principalship in New Mexico. Hopefully a good response will be realized in this request."